

society for social responsibility in science

SSRS Newsletter

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PEARL BUCK'S BROADWAY PLAY ON SCIENCE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CLOSES AFTER 7 PERFORMANCES

On March 24, a drama by Pearl Buck was produced at the Golden Theater in New York, portraying a group of scientists who are working on a secret super-weapon and suffering pangs of conscience. It was the first play written by the veteran novelist.

In the climax of the play, the scientists decide not to make the new weapon but to devote their knowledge to more peaceful purposes. As the curtain falls, the two chief characters are telephoning their colleagues and asking them to join in their protest against the possible extinction of mankind.

The play, "A Desert Incident", received hostile reviews from New York's major drama critics and closed after running only seven performances.

Criticisms of the play stated Mrs. Buck's writing was amateurish, that the acting and production were unsatisfactory, and that the ideas expressed were confused and unclear.

Brooks Atkinson's *New York Times* review began by saying, "Don't count on the scientists. To judge by [this play], they are more mixed up than the rest of us."

However, one critic, Kenneth Tynan, writing in the *New Yorker* magazine, attributed the failure of the play,

at least in part, to the unpopularity of the main philosophical position taken by the characters of the drama.

"She [Mrs. Buck] argues, or seems to be arguing," says Tynan, "that the scientists of the West should decide, unilaterally, to withhold from their governments any information that might be used to prosecute a war. This, of course, is a fairly extreme position to take, and until a few days ago I would not have worried very much about the rejection of a play that advocated it."

Tynan then relates a conversation he had had with a well-informed high business executive who had openly advocated the total destruction of the human race as a more desirable alternative than the loss of liberty.

This chance conversation, Tynan says, convinced him that the Pearl Buck play has considerable merit in spite of its alleged faults.

"She chose the most important subject in the world," he concludes, "and though she handled it vaguely and emotionally, she came down on the side of life, while the detached, historical viewpoint of my smiling friend led him to espouse the cause of death. Because of her choice, and her commitment, I am prepared to forgive Mrs. Buck a great deal."

JUDGE WONT GIVE SSRS A CHARTER

The prolonged legal struggle of the SSRS to obtain a nonprofit charter of incorporation received a major setback March 21 when Judge Edward G. Biester of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, agreed to the demand by the local American Legion that the charter be denied.

Refusal of the charter was on a technicality—that the purposes of the SSRS are not stated clearly enough in the Constitution of the Society. This was one of the many reasons suggested by the Legion for denying the charter of incorporation; other objections raised by the Legion included the fact that the SSRS has members in many countries, and the fact that most if not all of the officers of the SSRS, according to the Legion, are or have been conscientious objectors.

(The statement of purposes which is claimed to be "unclear" appears on page 2 of this and every issue of the SSRS Newsletter.)

The SSRS had applied for a charter following a decision at the Annual meeting of September, 1957, when members had heard a report that at least one philanthropic foundation might be willing to provide funds for holding a Conference on Peaceful Uses of Science—if the gift were tax-exempt, which would be true only if the SSRS had been formally and legally incorporated and granted a not-for-profit charter.

Because of Legion opposition, decision on the charter had been delayed for almost two years.

In rejecting the request of the SSRS for a charter, Judge Biester overruled the recommendation of the court-appointed Master, who had determined the facts of the case after taking extensive testimony and inquiring at length into the history, structure, and activities of the Society. The Master, John Justus Bodley, was appointed after the SSRS' attorney, T. Sidney Cadwallader, had asked the Legion attorneys to agree to an argument in court on the legal basis for rejecting the application, and had been refused.

Following this, the Master was

This Newsletter is published by the Society for Social Responsibility in Science, an organization of scientists and engineers whose purpose, according to its constitution, is "to foster throughout the world a functioning cooperative tradition of personal moral responsibility for the consequences for humanity of professional activity, with emphasis on constructive alternatives to militarism;...to embody in this tradition the principle that the individual must abstain from destructive work and devote himself to constructive work, drawing the line between the two according to his own moral judgment;...to ascertain through open and free discussion the boundary between constructive and destructive work to serve as a guide for individual and group discussion and action..."

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appointed by the judge after obtaining agreement by both parties to his choice of a man.

SSRS President Edward G. Ramberg commented: "It is clear that the impediments placed in the path of incorporation have both been a severe financial drain on the Society and have seriously interfered with its mission of emphasizing the constructive aspects of science and technology as against their destructive aspects. The question arises whether, in this instance, the setting aside of the recommendation of the Master, appointed by the court with the consent of the Legion attorneys to hear testimony, is not a grave disservice to the cause of civil rights."

Following are excerpts from the

Master's Report, which the Court later disregarded:

"From the evidence adduced at the hearing, the Master makes the following findings of fact:

"1. The Society for Social Responsibility in Science is an unincorporated association which was formed in September, 1949 at Haverford College, Pennsylvania.

"2. Said Society was initially formed by about forty persons with Victor Paschkis, a professor at Columbia University, as the moving spirit.

"3. The Society has functioned as an unincorporated association since its formation in 1949 with its principal office located in varying places according to the residence of the officers of the association at the time...

"4. Among the Society's members are scientists and engineers, some of whom have been Nobel Prize winners and many of whom are internationally known and leading scientists...

"5. The membership includes citizens of many countries of the world, as well as citizens of the United States.

"6. The annual meetings of the Society since its formation have been held with but two exceptions in the State of Pennsylvania.

"7. There is no official connection between the Society and any religious group, although many members are also members of the Society of Friends.

"8. Many of the members of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science are conscientious objectors...

"The principal object...is to get the individual scientist to recognize his obligation to preserve life and benefit humanity on a high level similar to the obligation of the physician as found in the Hippocratic Oath. This object grows out of the conviction that weapons such as the atomic bomb are no longer effective in protecting this nation or all of mankind...to channel the skills of scientists, who by reason of personal convictions and reasons of conscience find that they cannot continue in destructive work, into work which is both consistent with such convictions and helpful to the nation and mankind as a whole...to form groups of scientists who can give technical information which would be of benefit to

organizations such as the 'American Friends Service Committee' in their work in underdeveloped countries... [and] to provide a forum for discussion among persons having similar convictions both through discussion meetings and through the medium of a newsletter which is published monthly by the Society...

"There is no requirement for membership that a prospective member shall not engage in destructive work; however, the Society urges avoidance of such work...Both the President and Secretary of the Society have security clearance from the U.S. Government in connection with their work, and many other members of the organization have such clearance...

"The Master, having heard the testimony of the witnesses, and after review of the record and the law involved, has concluded that the charter applied for should be granted...

"The Master has examined the Articles of Incorporation and the Record and finds the technical requirements of the Act have been complied with in their entirety...

"The objections voiced...are two: namely, that the purposes set forth...do not meet the requirement of Section 203 of the Statute in that they are not precise and accurate and that the purposes of the proposed corporation are unlawful and injurious to the community...

"In the Master's view, a careful reading of the purposes set forth in the Articles leads to the conclusion that the said purposes do meet the standard of 'precise and accurate.' There can be no question from a study of the express purposes as to just what the Society proposes to do as a non-profit corporation. Since the scope of the activities is very broad, contemplating as it does, reaching out over the world in its operation, the purposes must necessarily be expressed in broad enough language to permit the lawful carrying on of the functions of the Society under its charter. Though broad in scope, the Master finds that the purposes expressed are expressed accurately and with precision so as to leave no doubt in the mind of the Court as to just what the corporation contemplates. Because the purposes are accurately and precisely expressed, the Protestants [the Legion] were able to conclude that such purposes are unlawful and injurious

to the community.

"The Master disagrees with that conclusion. The first amendment to the United States Constitution protects the right of persons in freedom of speech and lawful assembly. If a man is to be free, the right to express his opinions freely is a necessity. Denial of this freedom to one man or a group of persons banded together because of common beliefs would be a throwback to the Old-World tyranny from which the founders of this country fled... The Master does not think that any attempt on the part of individual members of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science or on the part of the Society itself to communicate its beliefs and thoughts with regard to personal morality and with regard to the necessity for settling conflicts by peaceful means can be the subject of restraint under existing law. True, also, if the individual members of the Society or the Society as a whole violates any existing law of the Commonwealth or of the Nation, proper action will then be required. Until such a situation exists, it does not seem to the Master within the province of a Court being asked to consider the propriety of granting a charter to the Society as a non-profit corporation, to speculate as to possible unlawful actions that the members or the Society may, in the future, take. ...The record of the hearing in this case will reveal that no suggestion has been made by the Protestants that the Society as an unincorporated association has in any way violated the laws of the State or nation. The Protestants' case against the granting of the charter is based upon its conclusion that the purposes expressed in the Articles are unlawful and injurious to the community. But ...the purposes are, in themselves, not viewed as being unlawful or injurious but, to the contrary, the Protestants are afraid of the ultimate effect upon our national security which the spread of the Society's beliefs might have. In ruling on the question before the Master, cognizance should be taken of the known fact that atomic and hydrogen bombs, with devastating and diabolical power of destruction, are in the hands of both our country and our potential enemy. Recognition should also be given to the fact that many eminent scientists throughout recent years have expressed themselves as being con-

cerned about the future of civilization in the event another shooting war breaks out. Conclusions have been reached by those who should know best the possible consequences of an all-out atomic war to the effect that modern civilization as we know it would, for all intents and purposes, be completely wiped out. The history of mankind is replete with proof of that which all thinking people now acknowledge; namely, that lasting peace is not gained through warfare or the preparation for warfare. Quite the contrary, gains derived from warfare, being ill-gotten, are generally lost or at least always subject to the risk of being lost. We know too that the building up of huge military machines and organizations in the scramble for superior power, has in the past and may in the future, lead to war. Since the differences between nations have not in the past been satisfactorily resolved by warfare and the building up of machinery for war, it is not difficult to suggest that a solution to international problems by means other than warfare would be desirable.

"The free communication of the beliefs of the members of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science just conceivably might be more effective in our efforts to preserve peace and our civilization than would be the building of armaments. In this connection, recognition must be given to the fact that among the members of the proposed corporation are many outstanding scientists throughout the world. While not attempting to decide the merits of the approach being taken by the Society, the Master believes that basic fundamental rights relating to freedom of speech and the free communication of ideas are at stake and believes therefore that this Society should have a right to function as a corporation just as it has functioned as an unincorporated association.

"...The Master has heard the testimony and has examined various publications submitted to him at the hearing in an effort to determine whether or not the purposes of this Society are "lawful". It is certainly lawful to foster or promote within persons a tradition of personal moral responsibility. It is certainly lawful to urge (if such urging is done in a lawful manner) persons to abstain from destructive work and devote themselves to constructive work. It

is certainly lawful to hold open and free discussions in order to arrive at conclusions respecting what can be considered constructive and what destructive. And so on through the purposes expressed in the Articles of Incorporation. In themselves, the Master cannot find that any of the expressed purposes are unlawful.

"Turning then to whether or not such purposes are injurious to the community,...the Non-Profit Corporation Act does not define what is meant by the word "community". When the intended scope of activity of the corporation is limited to a small geographical area such as a borough, township or county, it would seem that the "community" involved here is made up of the residents of this limited area. When the scope of the intended function of the Corporation is world-wide as in the case before the court, it would seem that the "community" involved includes the unlimited corners of the earth with all the people living thereon. Does the spreading of the views of this Society respecting the desirability to create within scientists a feeling of personal moral responsibility constitute an injurious act and does it harm the community? Does the urging of abstention from destructive work and as an alternative the engaging in constructive work appear to be injurious to the community? Does the establishment of an employment agency for a certain group of scientists suggest anything injurious to the community? As the Master sees it, the answers to these questions are obvious...

"In view of the foregoing, the Master makes the following CONCLUSIONS OF LAW:

"1. The incorporators of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science have complied with all of the procedural requirements of the Non-Profit Corporation Law.

"2. The Articles of Incorporation are in proper form and within the provisions of the Non-Profit Corporation Law.

"3. The purposes given in the Articles are lawful and not injurious to the community.

"4. The name is presently available for corporate use as evidenced by a certificate from the Secretary of the Commonwealth issued within six months of the date of the Application for a Charter.

"5. The application for a Charter should be granted."

TO MAINTAIN ITS PRESENT ACTIVITIES, THE SSRS MUST INCREASE ITS INCOME IN THE COMING YEAR BY ABOUT \$400. ONE POSSIBILITY OF ACHIEVING THIS IS TO RAISE MEMBERSHIP DUES TO \$3, \$6 AND \$10 FOR THE SEVERAL INCOME GROUPS. MEMBERS AND READERS ARE ASKED TO SUGGEST ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES FOR MEETING THIS PROBLEM.

--THE COUNCIL

The 1959 Annual Meeting of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science has been scheduled for September 5 and 6, 1959, at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio. Details of the program will appear in subsequent issues of this Newsletter.

EMPLOYMENT

The Occupation Division of the SSRS was created for the purpose of making it easier for scientists to act according to conscience when choosing their employment. If a man loses his job because of his attitude toward performing duties involving "destructive" work, or if he leaves a job because he is conscientiously unable to perform work he deems immoral, the SSRS Occupation Division may be able to help.

All correspondence regarding the printing of ads and replies to ads should be sent to the Occupation Division Chairman, M. Jane Oesterling, Woman's Medical College, Philadelphia 29, Penna. When a name is given in the ad for a direct reply, a copy of the correspondence should be sent to Jane Oesterling.

SITUATIONS WANTED

CHEMICAL ENGINEER, 29, (trained in Hungary) seeks position in chemical industry. Experience includes manufacture of fine organic chemicals and biochemical research on bacterial systems.

PHYSICAL CHEMIST (Ph.D. candidate, coordination compounds), broad organic/inorganic background, wishes non-military research or research/teaching position with opportunity to study toward theoretical physics Ph.D. Publications and 7 years college chemistry teaching experience. Can teach introductory calculus of finite differences and treatment of experimental data. East Coast preferred, willing to travel.

CHEMIST OR CHEMICAL ENGINEER to formulate and execute broad-scope basic research program in radiation catalysis of hydrocarbon reactions. Unusual independence in a sponsored project which may lead to significant constructive application of nuclear energy. Complete analytical systems: kilocurie gamma source, nuclear reactor, and machine computation facilities available. Major eastern university. Ph.D. or equivalent experience.

ELECTRONIC ENGINEER AND ELECTRONIC TECHNICIANS for constructive work in expanding medical electronics firm. Circuit design, especially with transistors, or product development experience desired. Biophysical Electronics, Inc. 20 E. Herman St., Philadelphia 44, Pa.

ENGINEER with Master's degree in mathematics needed for teaching position in Ghana. Write: H. Muenstermann, Mission Board, 1505 Race St., Philadelphia 2, Pa.

MATHEMATICIAN for teaching post at Earlham College. Opportunity to help create imaginative curriculum. Ph.D. or near Ph.D. required. Write: Howard Alexander, Department of Mathematics, Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana.

PHYSICIST--for full-time instructorship or assistant professorship at Wilmington College, Wilmington, Ohio. Ph.D. or near Ph.D. preferred. Address: W. Brooke Morgan, Jr., Acting President.

SENIOR TECHNICIAN OR JUNIOR ENGINEER with minimum 3 years experience, to assume responsibility for design and construction of medical electronic equipment. Salary commensurate with experience.

Late Newsletters

Do not think evil thoughts about the United States Postal Department. They have not kept your Newsletters locked up. The fault is entirely in the production department of this Newsletter, where a series of problems has caused the schedule to run later and later, until now you are reading the "April" issue in July.

The basic reason for the recent delays in publication is that the Newsletter, in the present state of our Society, is edited as a one-man job, and when the one man is unable to carry out his function, the Newsletter remains unpublished.

However, the Newsletter seems indispensable to the Society. First, most of the members of the Society are fairly well isolated from each other, and without some form of regular communication they would have only a tenuous contact with the organization and with their fellow members. Second, the Newsletter is our main means of making contact with prospective members. Therefore we will continue our attempt to produce a Newsletter per month, and we ask our readers to be patient while we try various means of making our publication dates more uniform.

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